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ABSTRACT

Research studies on class size date back to 1900. Common sense has suggested that small classes lead to greater academic achievement, but most research on the effects of class size on achievement have been inconclusive. Furthermore, the financial costs and political consequences of reducing class size have generally prohibited the adoption of class size reduction alternatives. The Department of Education in the State of Indiana, however, has adopted Project PRIMETIME, which has attempted to reduce the class size in primary grades throughout the state. This document reports on the effect on student learning of reducing first grade class size to 18 students or fewer. Subjects for the studies were first-grade students in three elementary schools in Princeton, Indiana. Results of 13 studies, focusing mainly on basic reading and mathematics skills, provide overwhelming evidence of the gains in scores for students in the small-size classes of the 1984-85 school year as compared to the larger classes of the previous year. Four tables, one page of references, copies of the reading and mathematics evaluation systems, and a letter from the governor are appended. (IW)

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# THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS OF A STATE SUPPORTED REDUCED CLASS SIZE PROGRAM

**INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**ISU**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**TERRE HAUTE**

**INDIANA**

EA 018 942

# THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS OF A STATE SUPPORTED REDUCED CLASS SIZE PROGRAM

A Comprehensive Evaluation
of Indiana's
Project PRIME TIME
at the
North Gibson School Corporation

by

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and
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August 1985

## Background of the Problem

The climate of a school is set and influenced by the motivation, measured ability and achievement of the students, and the morale of its teachers. In the past few years, class size has become a major issue for school administrators and school boards. Shall class size be set in a haphazard manner while trying to balance the budget, by tradition, by trial and error, or has the time come to take a look at the research that has been completed?

Research studies on class size date back as far as 1900. The question, "Are smaller classes better?" has been bothering teachers, parents, and administrators since that time. If someone were to ask whether smaller classes are better than larger ones, one would probably say, "Smaller is better." However, it is often the case that common sense may not necessarily be so.

There are several reasons that common sense would suggest that smaller is better. Among them are:

1. Teachers would have the energy and interest to give more concerned care and attention to each child if there are fewer in the classroom.

2. Classroom management is more effective when teachers spend more time with each student and keep track of individual progress.

3. Teachers will be able to employ a wider variety of instructional strategies, methods, and learning activities and can be more effective with them when class size is small.

4. Teachers' attitudes and morales are more positive when they have fewer students.

5. Small class size makes good use of added time and space.

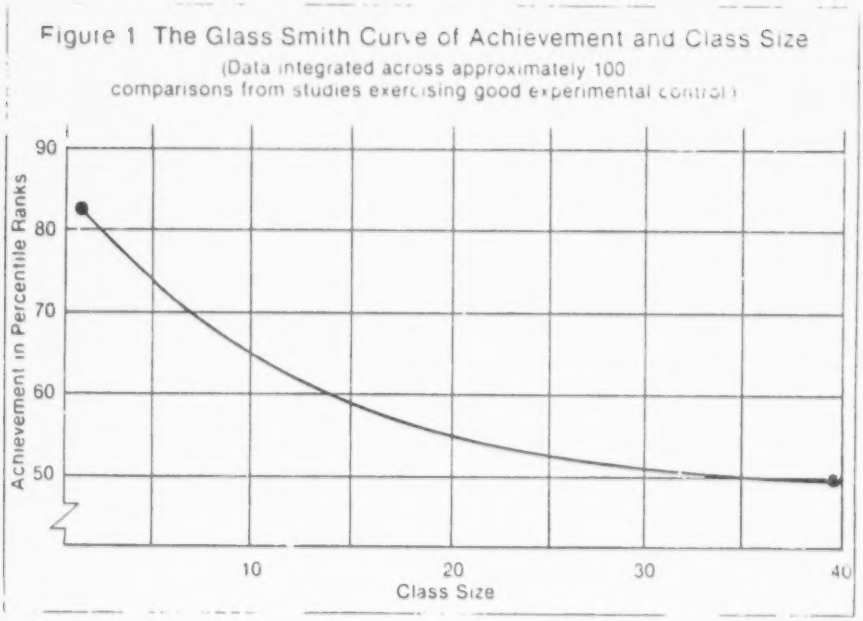
6. Teachers will be able to find more time to plan, diversify, and individualize their teaching.

7. As teacher attention, energy, and time are shared among fewer students, the environment will be more conducive to learning.

A survey of the research done on the effects of class size on achievement would conclude that "until recently, the relationship between class size and achievement has been inconclusive as some studies have favored smaller classes, others larger, and have found no relationship between the two variables."

However, a widely publicized study by Smith and Glass (1979) attempted to generalize from the results of a variety of studies on class size carried out by different methods under different conditions and using different criteria for measuring achievement of students. Smith and Glass concluded that the studies provided evidence of a significant negative relationship between class size and student achievement regardless of grade levels, subject areas, and ability ranges. The study went so far as to predict how achievement might vary with class size. This prediction is illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE I




Glass, G.V., Cahen, L.S., Smith, M.L., and Filby, N.N. (1979)

However, an evaluation of the study by Smith and Glass conducted by the Educational Research Service (1980) concluded that "the effects of class size on pupil achievement across all grade levels are contradictory and inconclusive." Other studies by Shapson et.al. (1980) and Cacha (1982) concluded that "Smith and Glass had made bold generalizations that were not supported by any test of significance."

As is the case in most controversies, there are opinions to reason why small size does not produce uniformly positive results. These are:

1. What occurs in classes (beliefs and capabilities of the teachers, abilities and backgrounds of the pupils, subject matter, etc.) has a greater effect on achievement than class size per se.

2. Many educators believe that class size must be very small (below 14) before any dramatic increase in achievement will appear.

3. Few, if any, pupil benefits can be expected from reducing class size if educators continue to use the same instructional methods and procedures in smaller classes that they used in larger classes.

4. Teachers' styles dictate the extent to which individual attention is given to each student, and most teachers do not take advantage of the small class to individualize instruction.

5. Reduced class sizes in the primary grades will increase teacher dependence and reduce self-discipline. The effect of this could be serious for students who must attend larger classes in later grades.

6. A typical finding in studies involving class size is that there are no significant differences in achievement of large versus small classes.

7. To assign all teachers in a school system to classes of less than 20 students would be very expensive.

8. Teaching alternatives (aides, split schedules, etc.) have not been demonstrated to be effective in practice.

9. Instructional effectiveness is more dependent on the teacher than on class size.

10. The financial costs and political consequences make the class size reduction alternative prohibitive.

The Department of Education in the State of Indiana has adopted Project PRIMETIME, which has attempted to reduce the class size in primary grades throughout the State. The first year effort was to reduce the class size in grade one to eighteen or below. A pilot study conducted to determine the possible effects of such a project was conducted in several schools in Indiana. Results indicated that there were significant gains to be expected from the reduction of class size and that students would learn more of the basic skills when class size reduction did occur.

However, this pilot study has been criticized because of several possible flaws. First, it was noted that teachers who participated in the pilot study were very carefully chosen, rather than being selected through traditional hiring or assignment practices. Second, it was pointed out that while many variables were measured in the study, only those that produced significant results were reported. It is important to note that Department of Education officials have been extremely reluctant to have the results of the program evaluated by a statewide study, and the only attempts to evaluate PRIMETIME have been subjective observations of the activities in carefully selected school systems by six evaluators who were carefully controlled by Department of Education staff.

Shapson et.al. (1980) conducted a comprehensive study of the effects of class size for fourth and fifth grade classes of 16, 23, 30, and 37 students. They measured the effects of these class sizes on achievement in reading, mathematics, composition, and art; student self-concept; and a variety of classroom process variables such as teacher-pupil interaction, pupil participation, method of instruction, and teacher expectation. Results indicated better mathematics achievement in classes of size 16 than in classes of 30 or 37.

The results of this study suggest that there is an importance on the emphasis of instructional methods and quality of instruction that is more important than the number of pupils in the classroom. The study concludes that few pupil benefits can be expected from reducing class size if educators continue to use the same instructional methods and procedures in smaller classes that were used in larger classes. The study further found that many of the teachers did not take advantage of smaller classes to individualize instruction.

When anything as expensive as class size reduction is practiced, it is essential that an evaluation of its effectiveness must be undertaken. The cost of class size is not limited to the cost of the teachers' and aides' salaries and materials. Cost problems become greatly intensified when a building program must be undertaken to accommodate more classes of smaller size.

## Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness on increased student learning of the PRIMETIME Project of the North Gibson School Corporation in Princeton, Indiana.

Specifically, the study investigated the following hypothesis:

> There is no significant difference between the mean scores on any of the criterion variables for students assigned to large classes (approximately 23.4) and those assigned to smaller classes (18 or less).

Among the criterion variables investigated are:

Reading Basic Skills Raw Score
Reading Basic Skills Percent Mastery
Mathematics Basic Skills Raw Score
Mathematics Basic Skills Percent Mastery
Attitude Toward School
Self-Concept
Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading Subtest
Iowa Basic Skills Mathematics Subtest
Iowa Basic Skills Composite Score

Students and the classes they are enrolled in are often different in respect to intelligence. The above hypothesis was investigated from uncorrected raw scores but was also investigated when scores were adjusted for differences in intelligence. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was used as an Intelligence Test for the purpose of adjusting the scores.

If class size reduction increases student achievement, then the mean scores of students for the 1984-85 school year should be significantly higher than the mean scores of students for the 1983-84 school year.

## Method

Subjects. Subjects for the studies were elementary students enrolled in the first grade of three elementary schools of the North Gibson School Corporation in Princeton, Indiana. During the 1983-84 school year, approximately 190 students were enrolled in eight classes which ranged in size from 20 to 26 students. The average class size in 1983-84 was 23.8 students. During the 1984-85 school year, approximately 179 students were enrolled in nine classes with an intended class size of no more than eighteen.

## The Studies

A summary of the 13 studies that were conducted is contained in Table I.

Basic Skills Tests (studies 1-4). These studies compared results on locally constructed tests of basic skills for the two-year period in an attempt to determine whether significant gains in scores could be attributable to class size. Tests were constructed by the evaluator's staff for the purpose of measuring mastery of the mathematics and reading skills that had been designated by teachers to be the curriculum content of the first grade.

Separate tests were constructed for mathematics skills and for reading skills. The mathematics tests measured thirteen skills with five items per skill for a total of 65 items. The reading test measured 16 skills with six items per skill for a total of 96 items.

Tests were administered during the first week of May during each of the two school years. Tests were scored according to the number of correct responses and also according to the number of concepts that had been mastered by the student. A score of 70 percent of the items for a skill answered correctly was selected as the mastery criterion. Tests were of higher reliability with each of the two tests having reliability indexes of above .90 for each of the two years.

TABLE I

Studies Performed

| Study | No. | Test | Data |
|---|---|---|---|
| Basic Skills | 1 | Mathematics Skills Test | # Right |
| | 2 | Reading Skills Test | # Right |
| | 3 | Mathematics Skills Test | # of Skills > 70% |
| | 4 | Reading Skills Test | # of Skills > 70% |
| Iowa Test of Basic Skills | 5 | Mathematics Section | Raw Score Percentile |
| | 6 | Reading Section | Raw Score Percentile |
| | 7 | Composite | Raw Score Percentile |
| | 8 | Mathematics Section | Score Adjusted by IQ |
| | 9 | Reading Section | Score Adjusted by IQ |
| | 10 | Composite | Score Adjusted by IQ |
| Affective | 11 | Self-Concept | Raw Score |
| | 12 | Attitude Toward School | Raw Score |
| | 13 | Total Affective | Sum of (11) and (12) |

Study 1 compared the means of the total raw score on the Mathematics Skills Test. Study 2 compared the means of the total raw scores on the Reading Skills Test.

Scores for each of the individual skills were compared to a criterion score of 70 percent. The number of skills that had been mastered by each student was determined. Study 3 compared the mean number of skills mastered for each of the two groups. Study 4 compared the mean number of reading skills that had been mastered for the two groups.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (studies 5-10). The Iowa Test of Basic Skills, First Grade, Form 7, was administered at each of the schools during March and April. Results for the two years were compared. Study 5 compared the mean raw scores for the mathematics section of the test. Study 7 compared the mean composite score. A composite score for the test was arrived at by determining the combined score for the reading, language arts, and mathematics sections of the test.

It is possible to account for differences in groups that are due to variations in ability by making comparisons of scores that are adjusted to compensate for individual differences in intelligence or some other measure. For studies 8, 9, and 10, mathematics, reading, and composite scores were adjusted for differences in intelligence, and the adjusted scores were compared for the two school years. Scores for the Iowa Test were adjusted to compensate for differences in IQ as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

Affective Measures (studies 11-13). At the request of one of the principals of the participating schools, an affective measure was developed to ascertain if differences existed between the attitudes and values of the two groups.

After extensive research by the evaluator's staff into what would constitute measures of attitudes and values for first grade students, a 37-item affective test of the Likert variety was constructed. Research had shown that the only meaningful measures of attitudes and values for children as young as the study subjects were self-concept and attitude toward school. Raw scores were computed for 19 items on the Self-Concept test and 18 items on the Attitude Toward School test.

Statistical Analysis. All tests were machine scored and analyzed by computer methods. Results were tested for significance by the two way analysis of variance procedures of the BIOMED statistical package. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills results were also adjusted for differences in IQ as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. This was accomplished by an analysis of covariance procedure of the BIOMED package.

Results were analyzed subjectively and were tested for significance. Although the .05 and .01 levels of significance have been traditionally used, this study reported the actual level of significance as determined by the analysis of variance and analysis of covariance procedures.

## Results

Results for the studies are summarized in Table II. It can be noted that all of the studies showed highly significant gains, with the single exception of Iowa Basic Skills Composite Score corrected by IQ.

In an attempt to further analyze the differences between the two groups, a comparison was made for the scores in the two school years for the three participating schools. This data is contained in Table III. It can be noted that each school showed gains on each of the variables with the exception of the Attitude Toward School measure for the third school. It might also be noted that there was a decrease of IQ score from the first year to the second for the third school. Otherwise, each school had a gain in mean scores when students were taught in small groups.

A further comparison was made in the mean scores of each of the measures for each of the teachers who participated in the study. Eight of the nine teachers taught both years. No comparison could be made for the ninth teacher, who was added during the second year to accomplish the requirements of the PRIMETIME program. Results of the score by teacher comparison are contained in Table IV.

The overwhelming trend for each of the studies is that each teacher shows substantial gains on most of the measures when comparisons are made between scores for the two school years. There are a few exceptions, but these appear to be of a rather random nature.

TABLE II

Summary of Results

| Study | No. | Scores | 84 Mean | 85 Mean | Sig. Test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skills | 1 | Math | 48.7 | 56.0 | .0001 |
| (# Right) | 2 | Reading | 71.9 | 79.9 | .0001 |
| Mastery | 3 | Math | 8.5 | 11.8 | .001 |
| (Skills > 70%) | 4 | Reading | 10.6 | 13.6 | .001 |
| Iowa | 5 | Math | 59.3 | 70.0 | .0001 |
| (Percentiles) | 6 | Reading | 71.4 | 80.7 | .0001 |
| | 7 | Composite | 58.4 | 76.3 | .0001 |
| Iowa | 8 | Math | 62.7 | 72.4 | .0008 |
| (Adjusted by IQ) | 9 | Reading | 76.5 | 82.9 | .0023 |
| | 10 | Composite | 72.4 | 75.9 | .1786 |
| Affective | 11 | Self-Concept | 11.4 | 16.5 | .0001 |
| | 12 | School Attitude | 11.7 | 12.1 | .01 |
| | 13 | Total | 22.9 | 25.6 | .0001 |
| IQ | | Peabody Test | 109.6 | 110.7 | n.s. |
| Number of Subject | | | 190 | 179 | |

TABLE III

Results by School

| Study | No. | Scores | Means School 1 84 | School 1 85 | School 2 84 | School 2 85 | School 3 84 | School 3 85 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skills | 1 | Math | 49.1 | 54.4 | 51.1 | 60.2 | 51.4 | 54.1 |
| (# Right) | 2 | Reading | 57.1 | 64.3 | 75.2 | 82.1 | 63.5 | 75.0 |
| Iowa | 5 | Math | 49.4 | 60.4 | 69.5 | 87.4 | 53.1 | 61.7 |
| (Percentiles) | 6 | Reading | 72.9 | 78.7 | 76.8 | 85.6 | 77.7 | 80.3 |
| | 7 | Composite | 60.1 | 61.5 | 77.5 | 85.8 | 66.8 | 76.1 |
| Iowa | 8 | Math | 63.2 | 76.9 | 73.8 | 83.8 | 74.0 | 79.9 |
| (Adj. by IQ) | 9 | Reading | 49.6 | 58.0 | 68.4 | 86.7 | 49.7 | 61.6 |
| | 10 | Composite | 49.6 | 53.0 | 68.4 | 86.7 | 50.0 | 61.5 |
| Affective | 11 | Self-Concept | 12.0 | 16.2 | 12.0 | 17.5 | 10.0 | 15.8 |
| | 12 | School Attitude | 10.7 | 12.2 | 11.3 | 15.1 | (11.7 | 11.1) |
| | 13 | Total | 22.7 | 28.3 | 23.5 | 32.6 | 21.3 | 27.0 |
| IQ | | Peabody Test | 106.7 | 114.5 | 108.8 | 110.9 | 106.4 | 102.8 |

TABLE IV

Score Gains by Teacher

| Study | No. | Scores | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skills | 1 | Math | 1.8 | (-1.4) | 1.9 | 10.9 | 9.2 | 9.1 | 8.4 | 7.3 | - |
| (# Right) | 2 | Reading | 11.1 | 2.4 | (-1.7) | 7.7 | 9.0 | 14.6 | 19.3 | (-3.8) | - |
| Iowa | 5 | Math | 26.3 | 4.1 | (-10.8) | 12.7 | 19.0 | 26.4 | 16.7 | 11.7 | - |
| (Percentiles) | 6 | Reading | 8.4 | 0.8 | 3.5 | 7.3 | 10.5 | 15.6 | 5.2 | (-2.4) | - |
| | 7 | Composite | 9.9 | 3.1 | (-10.7) | 7.2 | 9.7 | 18.7 | 14.1 | (-2.0) | - |
| Affective | 11 | Self-Concept | 3.9 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 3.9 | 6.2 | 5.4 | 7.1 | 5.7 | - |
| | 12 | School Attitude | 2.6 | (-0.6) | 1.4 | 2.8 | 3.9 | 3.7 | (-0.3) | 4.1 | - |
| | 13 | Total | 6.5 | 4.1 | 6.2 | 6.7 | 9.8 | 9.1 | 7.7 | 9.9 | - |
| IQ | | Peabody Test | 3.7 | (-7.0) | 9.2 | (-5.7) | 2.8 | 19.4 | 1.5 | (-1.5) | - |

## Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Results of each of the studies provide overwhelming evidence of the gains in scores for students in the 1984-85 small size classes as compared to the larger classes of the 1983-84 school year.

Previous research studies that are related to class size have been inconclusive. Speculations have been made that reducing class size can be effective when students are of low ability and if, and only if, teachers provide different kinds of instruction for the small class size than they would have provided for large classes. However, the present evaluation provides no evidence that either of these conclusions are necessary for PRIMETIME classes to provide significant gains.

It should be noted that part of the success of the PRIMETIME Project of the North Gibson School Corporation may have been due to the increased accountability provided in the framework of the project evaluation. For the project, teachers were made responsible for a specific instructional content and were aware that their progress in those content areas would be evaluated.

Further implementation of PRIMETIME at North Gibson is an administrative decision. It is recommended that the results of these analyses be studied further to determine which methods produced the greatest success. It is further recommended

that future PRIMETIME classes be evaluated to determine whether the gains experienced in its initial year are substantive or merely due to an artifact that was due to its novelty.

However, it cannot be denied that the PRIMETIME program of the North Gibson School Corporation has succeeded admirably in its first evaluation.

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Appendix

NAME _____

STUDENT NUMBER _____

TEACHER _____

SCHOOL _____

DATE _____

OBJECTIVE REFERENCED

1

# MATHEMATICS EVALUATION SYSTEM

SCORE

| ITEM | SKILLS | SCORE | MASTERY ( ) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 - 5 | Knows numerals to 100 in any order. | _____ | _____ |
| 6 - 10 | Writes and counts to 100 by 10's, 5's, and 2's. | _____ | _____ |
| 11 - 15 | Solves addition problems with 3 addends. | _____ | _____ |
| 16 - 20 | Understands concepts: <, >, =. | _____ | _____ |
| 21 - 25 | Adds two digit numbers without regrouping. | _____ | _____ |
| 26 - 30 | Subtracts two digit numbers without regrouping. | _____ | _____ |
| 31 - 35 | Recognizes the symbols "+" for addition and "-" for subtraction. | _____ | _____ |
| 36 - 40 | Tells time to the hour and half-hour. | _____ | _____ |
| 41 - 45 | Identifies coins and their value in cents. | _____ | _____ |
| 46 - 50 | Recognizes ordinal numbers 1 - 5. | _____ | _____ |
| 51 - 55 | Knows place value for tens and ones. | _____ | _____ |
| 56 - 60 | Finds missing addends. | _____ | _____ |
| 61 - 65 | Recognizes halves, thirds, and fourths. | _____ | _____ |

North Gibson School Corporation
P.O. BOX 325
Princeton, Indiana 47670



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NAME _____

STUDENT NUMBER _____

TEACHER _____

SCHOOL _____

DATE _____

OBJECTIVE REFERENCED

1

# READING EVALUATION SYSTEM

SCORE

| ITEM | SKILLS | SCORE | MASTERY ( ) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 - 6 | Recognizes Dolch Basic Sight Words in instructional situations. | _____ | _____ |
| 7 - 12 | Recognizes word families. | _____ | _____ |
| 13 - 18 | Chooses from multiple meanings. | _____ | _____ |
| 19 - 24 | Recognizes upper and lower case letters. | _____ | _____ |
| 25 - 30 | Recognizes consonent sound heard in initial, medial and final position. | _____ | _____ |
| 31 - 36 | Uses blends in decoding. | _____ | _____ |
| 37 - 42 | Uses digraphs in decoding. | _____ | _____ |
| 43 - 48 | Identifies silent letter combinations and uses them in decoding. | _____ | _____ |
| 49 - 54 | Uses dipthongs in decoding. | _____ | _____ |
| 55 - 60 | Pronounces <u>short</u> vowel sound. | _____ | _____ |
| 61 - 66 | Pronounces <u>long</u> vowel sound. | _____ | _____ |
| 67 - 72 | Alphabetizes to first letter. | _____ | _____ |
| 73 - 78 | Reads paragraph and finds answers to questions. | _____ | _____ |
| 79 - 84 | Knows contractions. | _____ | _____ |
| 85 - 90 | Recognizes the number of syllables in words. | _____ | _____ |
| 91 - 96 | Recognizes main idea. | _____ | _____ |

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204-2797

ROBERT D. ORR
GOVERNOR

July 25, 1986

Dr. Edward T. Swan
Superintendent
North Gibson School Corporation
P.O. Box 325
Princeton, IN 47670

Dear Dr. Swan:

Thank you for the good words on PRIME TIME at North Gibson. Dr. Gilman's study was both interesting and encouraging.

Based on my own discussions with PRIME TIME teachers and my observations of hundreds of PRIME TIME classrooms, I'm convinced that PRIME TIME is making a difference in the education of our young people.

The next big hurdle will be to convince the '87 legislature, which will be asked to fully fund the program (Grades K-3) at somewhere close to $140 million.

As insurance, I encourage you to express your support of PRIME TIME to your state senators and representatives. If they haven't already, they too should get a copy of the Gilman study. Knowing that their constituency backs PRIME TIME will make it much easier for them to vote "aye" on the program.

Also, congratulations on a model Indiana Partners in Education program in Princeton. Given the community leadership evidenced through the partners program and the implementation of PRIME TIME it's no surprise that Princeton is one of Indiana's showcase cities in the competition for jobs.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

ROBERT D. ORR
Governor

RDO:nd